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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LE](#) [IS](#) [IZ](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: A/S WELCH'S FEBRUARY 6 MEETING WITH AMRE MOUSSA

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Stuart Jones
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch met Feb 6 with Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa. Moussa said that the Arab League and the U.S. "are in the same boat" in Iraq, and argued against a precipitous troop withdrawal. On Lebanon, Moussa will continue to push for implementation of the "Arab League Initiative," with a special focus on rapid presidential election and resolution of the cabinet impasse. Moussa argued that Israeli settlement activity was diminishing post-Annapolis momentum; A/S Welch urged Moussa to take a closer look at overall settlement activity in the West Bank, address the Arab League "culture of complaint" on peace prospects, and provide more explicit public support for Palestinian Authority President Abbas. Moussa argued that Iran "does not have the right" to engage in discussions on regional security, including with the U.S. End summary.

¶2. (C) IRAQ: Moussa told A/S Welch that the Arabs have come to realize that "they are in the same boat" as the U.S. with respect to Iraq. He said the League is continuing to support political conciliation in Iraq, and is planning an April 22nd meeting in Kuwait as a follow-up to the Sharm el Sheikh conference in 2007. The most important thing, he said, is for Arabs in Iraq to come together, and he assessed that there was an increasing realization among Iraqis that Iranian dominance was "not compatible" with Iraq's future. He said that it is critical there be no precipitous withdrawal of U.S. forces. Moussa said he interacts well with Iraqi PM Maliki, FM Zebari, and Barham Salih, and that he believes Maliki is "doing what he can under the circumstances." He believed that most Iraqi Sunnis had "accepted" the reality that the Shia are the majority. A/S Welch urged that Moussa support increased Arab diplomatic activity with the Iraqi government, including the reopening of Arab diplomatic missions in Baghdad. Moussa agreed to do what he could.

¶3. (C) LEBANON: Moussa said he was planning to return to Beirut February 8 to resume talks with the Lebanese political factions. He would place special emphases on a rapid presidential election and resolution of the cabinet impasse. Moussa reported that many in the opposition were still demanding the minority retain a "blocking third" in the cabinet (i.e. 11 of 30 seats). He contended that his efforts have moved the opposition slightly, and that a compromise might be reachable if it included sufficient "guarantees" for the opposition that would not allow the majority to claim an "auto-majority" of 20 seats that would be impervious to a veto. Practically speaking, he acknowledged that it was unlikely that such an "auto-majority" would materialize on major issues, given that the majority's share of seats (which has its own internal fractions) would likely be between 13-15, with the president controlling 5-7. Nevertheless, he said that neither the opposition nor the majority was confident in its position, and therefore both sought to maximize protection within any proposed cabinet structure. He did not think that public USG support for the "Arab League

Initiative" would be helpful at this time.

14. (C) Moussa, in a frustrated tone, said he believed that the SARG is the most dominant player in Lebanon, and that the SARG is pushing to maintain this influence down to the most minute details of the Lebanese political system. Iran is not as concerned with details of the political dynamic, so long as it maintains its influence and Hizballah remains in a strong position. Moussa thought that a boycott of the Arab League Summit by Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others (scheduled for March 29), might provide leverage against the Syrians; A/S Welch assessed that the summit is not nearly as important to Syria as is maintaining influence in Lebanon, and that such leverage therefore would likely be minimal.

15. (C) ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN ISSUES: A/S Welch urged Moussa to address a "culture of complaint" that permeated the Arab world on Israeli-Palestinian issues. Performance is critical for both Israel and the Palestinians, and the League should be focused on this. Moussa argued that the burden was squarely on Israel to stop post-Annapolis settlement activity. A/S Welch challenged this contention, pointing out that settlement expansion east of the West Bank security barrier had been virtually halted. A/S Welch said that the Olmert government remains committed to going forward, and that he expects a period of "intense bargaining" in the coming months. The USG expects settlement outposts to be removed. It is critical that the key players, such as Moussa, support this process. Moussa contended that the League does support Abbas, and returned to his view that Israeli settlement activity, especially around Jerusalem, was currently the major issue. He argued for a withdrawal to the lines of September 28, 2000 and said that Israeli control of Jerusalem is not a fait accompli, as he claimed Israelis believe, but rather an issue to be negotiated. A/S Welch

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agreed that Jerusalem was a special issue, and has been treated as such in all negotiations including the current GOI-PA discussions.

16. (C) A/S Welch urged Moussa to be more explicit on Arab League support of Abbas in the context of the recent Gaza/Rafah crisis. Moussa said that the League does publicly support Abbas; A/S Welch urged Moussa to make clear to all Arab League states their responsibility to support Abbas, as opposed to the Hamas orchestrators of the physical invasion by tens of thousands of Gazans into Egypt. Moussa declined to view the recent influx of tens of thousands of Gazans into Egypt as an "invasion" orchestrated by Hamas, notwithstanding the fact that the barrier along the Philadelphi corridor had been destroyed. Moussa said that the League does not support the rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel, but focused on the humanitarian pressures facing the Gazans as the precipitate to the recent Gaza/Rafah crisis.

17. (C) Iran: Moussa declared that the U.S. should not have discussions with Iran about regional security. A/S Welch responded that the USG does not currently have such discussions with Iran, and expressed confusion about why Moussa would raise the issue. Moussa rephrased, saying that Iran "does not have the right" to discuss regional security "with anyone" in the absence of Arab states. Moussa said he has delivered this message to the Iranians, most recently to Ali Larijani during his visit of early 2008.

8 (U) A/S Welch did not have the opportunity to clear this cable before departing Cairo.
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